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The primary goal for teachers of English composition is to help students achieve a competent oral and written style compatible with their own environment, age, sex, and socioeconomic background. To help students express their thoughts and perceptions clearly and logically, teachers should (1) exhibit a positive attitude toward writing, (2) provide a variety of stimuli for written and oral expression, such as photographs, movies, student narration , works of art, or current social problems; (3) accompany the stimuli with problems devised to generate creative thinking; (4) give students every opportunity to participate in oral and written language experiences through discussion in the classroom; and (5) utilize oral discourse as a means to improve written composition. The key factor in improving student writing is oral discussion. In an experiment with 112 ninth-graders divided into two groups, those who took part in oral language activities showed improvement in written composition over those who did not at the .01 level of significance. (MP)

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A MODEL FOR TEACHING COMPOSITION

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A MODEL FOR TEACHING COMPOSITION

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Educators and researchers realize that, at the end of high school or the first year of college, students will not write with the same degree of competence. Yet there is no reason why an individual student cannot develop a competent oral and written style which is compatible with his own environment, age, sex, and socio-economic background. Teachers of composition need not assume that writing cannot be taught simply because very few Orwells or Emersons emerge from our English classrooms. Instead, what teachers should strive for are students who can express, either orally or in writing, their unique ideas and emotions in an honest, understandable fashion. We can rephrase this idea in terms of goals for a model for teaching composition.

(1) The student should develop a positive attitude and motivation for expressing his thoughts and perceptions in oral and written language.

(2) He should produce writing which is clear, direct, economical, and sincere.

(3) He should be able to write clearly and logically on a variety of concepts and emotions relevant to him in a variety of ways.

The traditional composition model in the United States has been the write-correct-rewrite model which lacks in teaching flexibility and creativity. This deficiency prevents students and teachers from achieving the established goals. The results of the Anglo-American Conference at Dartmouth College in 1966 imply that a significantly different model for teaching composition is needed.

What are some of the classroom factors and some of the teacher-student variables which need to be considered in the development of a model for teaching composition? First, a positive attitude toward the writing act on the part of teachers is necessary to generate a positive attitude in students. Second, teachers must give the student an opportunity to participate in oral and written language experiences over a number of years. These language experiences must involve a variety of stimuli. Third, the process of teaching composition must capitalize on the influence which oral discourse has over written discourse. These two modes of discourse are physiologically and psychologically different, and the composition teacher must understand the characteristics of each form at different levels of maturity.

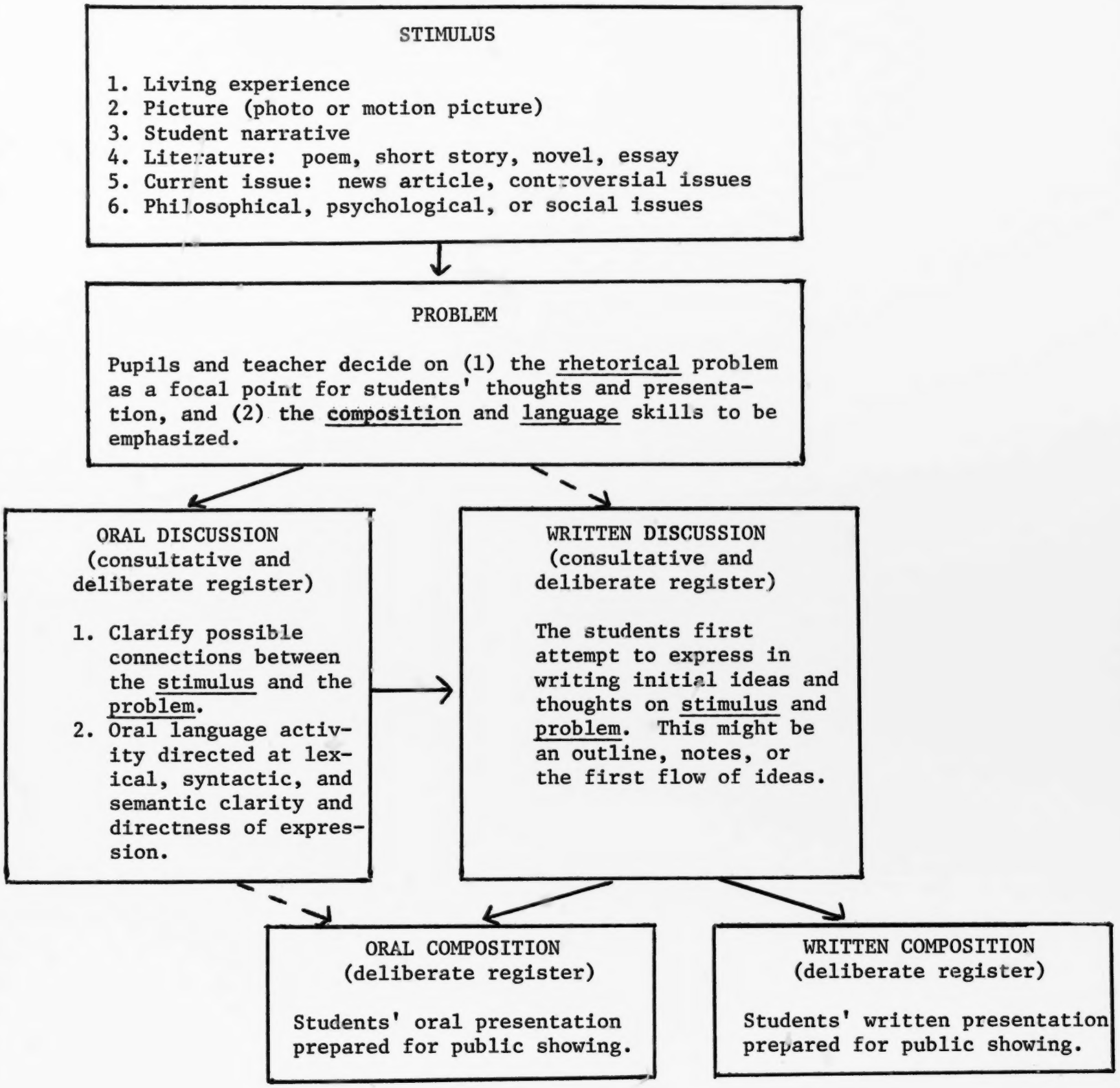
Insert Figure 1 about here

The model for teaching composition proposed in this paper, Figure 1, suggests relationships among the stimulus, the rhetorical problem, oral and written discussion, and the final oral and written composition. Also, this model attempts to utilize the best linguistic, rhetoric, and composition techniques which teachers and researchers have at their disposal. The diagram is a schematic presentation of the kinds of teacher-student composition activities which can take place at any grade level. In the following discussion of the model, the solid arrows indicate an uninterrupted flow of activities; the broken arrows indicate possible branchings.

The <u>stimulus</u> for the written or oral expression is the most urgent need for the student. The stimulus must be relevant to both student and teacher. It might come from a living experience, a photograph or movie, a student narration,

Figure 1

A MODEL FOR TEACHING COMPOSITION


STIMULUS
1. Living experience
2. Picture (photo or motion picture)
3. Student narrative
4. Literature: poem, short story, novel, essay
5. Current issue: news article, controversial issues
6. Philosophical, psychological, or social issues
PROBLEM
Pupils and teacher decide on (1) the rhetorical problem as a focal point for students' thoughts and presentation, and (2) the composition and language skills to be emphasized.
ORAL DISCUSSION (consultative and deliberate register)
1. Clarify possible connections between the stimulus and the problem.
2. Oral language activity directed at lexical, syntactic, and semantic clarity and directness of expression.
WRITTEN DISCUSSION (consultative and deliberate register)
The students first attempt to express in writing initial ideas and thoughts on stimulus and problem. This might be an outline, notes, or the first flow of ideas.
ORAL COMPOSITION (deliberate register)
Students' oral presentation prepared for public showing.
WRITTEN COMPOSITION (deliberate register)
Students' written presentation prepared for public showing.

a current issue, a work of literature, or some pertinent problem. At an elementary or junior high level the stimulus might serve mainly to activate the flow of discourse. In high school or college the stimulus may become more sophisticated and serve as the vehicle for the presentation and organization of concepts, as well as the vehicle for the development of new, expanded concepts and values.

The stimulus should lead the child through visualization of his environment, through the recreation of his own feelings and attitudes, through introspection on another person's feelings and attitudes, and through participation in vicarious situations. In imaginative composition the child can actually go through the kind of creative language process that a professional writer must experience. Much of the results of this kind of stimulus should be oral and dramatic as well as written.

The following example of student writing illustrates stereotyped, artificial prose written to satisfy the student's belief of teacher expectations:

> "I think the countryside is truly magnificent. It allows one to escape from the everyday bustle of the city life and to enter into a beautiful garden of tranquility."
>
> Grade 12

The next example of student writing illustrates pretentious, egocentric prose:

> "The silvery sun dances through my window pane. I lay on my bed thinking. Who am I? My name . . . Oh, so very unimportant. Everyone has a name. A name is just a title! Why am I here? If I strip myself of all my identity, who am I? A tiny speck of unimportant dust? Never have a purpose on earth. It says so in the book. But what is my purpose?"
>
> Grade 8

The sample of student prose below represents sincere, serious expression written in a clear, logical, direct, and economical style:

> "The loneliest place in the world is a recovery room after surgery. But this kind of loneliness is different than the kind you know. Even with all the people there, you're lonely because the people have to be there. They don't necessarily want to be there. Maybe there isn't anyone in the room, but then a nurse comes into a room and sticks a needle into your arm, even though you tell her you aren't having pain and the tears you were crying weren't tears of pain. You really can't tell her why you're crying, because she's one of the people who has to be there. The only way you can get over this feeling is being with someone who wants to be there, who wants to try and cheer you. Not your parents, but any kind of close friend."
>
> Grade 7

A problem must accompany each stimulus in order to generate creative thinking. The problem can relate to rhetoric, language, and composition skills. For example, a teacher produced from a brown paper bag stimuli in the form of an old high-top boot, a carved wooden figure of an aging man, a 1920 alarm clock, and a stuffed frog and suggested as the problem, "What do these objects remind you of from some past experience?" A student who had shown no previous writing ability produced the following poem:

A Frog's Too Real

When I was eight and thought that I
Could do what any boy could do,
Long summer days were really made
For fishing in the green canoe.

At five I'd learned to bait my hook,
And blue gills bit on bits of worm
That I had dug and cut in half.
I didn't mind how much they'd squirm.

Nor did I very often ask
For help in separating fish
From hook and worm, although sometimes
A little help was what I'd wish.

At six I'd learned the proper way
To put a minnow on a hook
In mouth, out gill, back through the tail--
He'd stay no matter how he shook.

But then the boys decided that
The time had come, since I was eight,
When I should learn to cast for bass,
And frogs were what we'd use for bait.

We got a net and minnow pail
And caught the frogs down in the slough,
Took tackle box, frogs and fishing poles,
And paddled out in the green canoe.

Then I took a frog from the minnow pail,
But when I brought the hook up near
I couldn't bear to thrust it in.
His throat pulsed hard, it seemed, with fear;

His popping eyes were frightened too.
I somehow knew what pain he'd feel.
I couldn't stand to have him die
Skewered on that hook of steel.

So I turned him loose, and didn't care
That I'd failed the test one should pass at eight.
I'll fish with worms and minnows still
But a frog's too real to use for bait.

Jean Dow
Grade 8

The more mature students can be presented problems such as audience appeal, argument, persuasion, approaches to logic, and paragraph development. Language problems can deal with the correspondence between intonation patterns and punctuation, or between segmental phonemes and spelling. Language problems also include vocabulary development, use of figurative language, use of coordination and subordination, creative use of movable linguistic elements, and expansions of the verb string. During the presentation and discussion of the problem, writing of peers as well as professional writers can be discussed but care must be taken not to overwhelm the students' creative imaginations by

offering examples of professional writing too difficult for students to emulate.

Oral discussion is not found in the traditional composition model. In the model presented in this paper, oral discussion is of two kinds. One concerns the correspondence between the stimulus and the rhetorical or language problem. Questions will be asked such as "How does it feel to eat a carrot?" or "What would it be like to be a poor Mississippi Delta Negro?" Try to describe your condition in two letters, one to James Baldwin, the other to Senator Eastland." The second kind of discussion concerns some deliberate language study and direct experience with certain language skills. For example, the discussion of the problem, "How does it feel to eat a carrot?" calls for vocabulary pertaining to the senses, sight, smell, size, taste, touch, feel. It also needs words that get to the feeling component of eating a cool carrot on a warm day. The topic dealing with the human condition of a Mississippi Delta Negro might include some notions of dialect, vocabulary pertinent to the culture of poverty, tone of expression, and rhetorical affect of subordination and coordination.

The following poem illustrates clear expression of intimate feeling which could not be discussed directly in class but only indirectly in relation to the problem of the inadequacy of language in some human situations:

Her

We sat apart from each other
Our feelings overwhelming,
We did not speak,
We sat in complete silence.

I turned to speak,
She lifted her head,
But I, like a coward I am,
Turned away, and hope fell to the depths.

She talked about the weather,
Who cared about the weather?
But we talked,
The barrier was broken,
We walked off hand in hand.

Stephen Downs
Grade 10

Written discussion in the model provides for the students' initial attempt to write after the stimulus, the problem, and the oral discussion have been presented. This written discussion might be the initial flow of ideas, the first draft, an outline, or simply some random notes or ideas on the subject. At this phase of the model, the teacher and other classmates become involved in a critique of the initial written response by asking: How can the ideas be better organized? How can the mechanical problems (spelling, punctuation) be altered? What language changes or revisions might be helpful? Is the topic relevant enough for the student to be further developed into a more finished oral composition or written composition? The term relevant refers simply to the student's ability to respond honestly to the stimulus and the problem.

From the initial, informal writing and discussion, the student can go to the more formal, polished oral or written composition. Not all stimuli should be developed into written compositions. Some stimuli for some students should result in oral composition in the deliberate register. The student of composition should collect his work during the school year and eventually save the best for a final evaluation showing. Formal teacher evaluation of the oral compositions and the written compositions need not be made on the practice activities but rather on the final "show" of the products which the student, his teacher, and his peers consider to be his best performances. The evaluative

criteria should then be the quality of the student's performance on principles emphasized during the period of instruction.

This proposed model breaks from the traditional write-correct-rewrite model. It alters the roles of the teacher and students in composition class. Traditionally, the teacher evaluates students' compositions. In the classroom where this model is used, the teacher aids and directs students as an adult specialist and tries at the same time to improve his own composition as well as that of his students. Also, with this type of composition teaching, each student is involved in a responsible way with the performance of his classmates. This proposed model also forces teachers to look at language study as an oral activity as well as a written activity.

Up to now, this paper has discussed the pedagogical uses of the composition model. There are also uses for the model in composition research. For example, a recent study has shown that the Oral Discussion between the Problem and the Written Discussion does make a difference in students' composition performance even though the broken arrow on the model indicates that this phase might be bypassed.

112 ninth-grade students were randomly divided into a control group of 56 students and an experimental group of 56 students. Both groups were administered the same Stimulus and the same Problem treatment. At this point, the control group went directly from Problem to Written Discussion whereas the experimental group went from Problem to Oral Discussion to Written Discussion. The experimental group had oral language activities which were designed to help students achieve the six rhetorical principles mentioned in the Problem portion of the treatment. Students verbalized possible interesting titles; they compared and

and contrasted similarities and differences of objects very much alike or different; they distinguished unique characteristics and tried to incorporate these unique characteristics into specific images by using figures of speech and content-specific vocabulary; they were given the technique for forming and using metaphor and simile; they were given opportunities to relocate nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs; and they were given oral activities involving coordination and subordination procedures.

Three teachers who did not know which themes were from which treatments, evaluated, on a seven-point scale, pre-writing and post-writing of control and experimental groups. Table 1 shows that the increase in change of writing behavior of the experimental group was significantly greater than the increase in change of writing behavior of the control group at the .01 level of significance.

Insert Table 1 about here

Further research is needed to verify and implement the model for teaching composition. Teachers and psychologists must cooperatively determine the kinds of stimuli that can be used for specific purposes at different age and grade levels and with different ability and temperament groups. Teachers, psychologists, linguists, and rhetoricians should exchange ideas in determining the kinds of problems to propose with certain stimuli at certain grade levels and the kind of oral language experience that should accompany these stimuli and problems. Finally, teachers, professional writers, and lay readers should determine levels of competence at various grade, ability, and temperament levels. Certainly a highly literate, technical society demands oral and written expression from its citizens which is clear, direct, and logical and which creatively deals with a variety of concepts, values, and attitudes.

Table 1

Observed and Expected Changes in Writing Behavior from Pre- to Postwriting Test

Group	Observed Increases	Observed Decreases	Observed No Change
Control (56 S)	21	12	23
Exper. (56)	42	4	11

Group	Expected Increases	Expected Decreases	Expected No Change
Control (56)	31.5	8	17
Exper. (56)	31.5	8	17

($X^2 = 14.6$ $p < .001$ for 2 df)

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